

David A. Katz: The Lawyer and Mensch

TRUMAN A. GREENWOOD*

David A. Katz grew up in Findlay, Ohio. Using \$100 he won (through a contest featured in a local newspaper) to help pay for his tuition, he enrolled at The Ohio State University and completed his undergraduate degree in three years. In 1957, he graduated summa cum laude from Ohio State's College of Law and was inducted into the Order of the Coif. He joined the law firm of Spengler, Nathanson, Heyman, McCarthy & Durfee in Toledo, Ohio and embarked on a thirty-seven-year career in private practice.

During this time, he was instrumental in the firm growing from seven to thirty-five attorneys. Stories are legion among members of the firm about his enthusiasm to be the "first" to arrive in the office in the morning and his drive to lead his colleagues in the number of "billable" hours per month.

Although his career encompassed a wide range of practice areas, including litigation during his early years, he was primarily recognized for his expertise in business transactions. He took several companies public and served as secretary/general counsel to one of the largest grocery store chains in Northwest Ohio. He was particularly adept at handling mergers and acquisitions because he could develop solutions to problems that would not only benefit his client, but also be acceptable and fair to all parties involved in the transaction. In short, he was a deal-maker, not a deal-breaker.

By advocating creatively and deferentially for his clients, David generated respect for his clients and himself. His favorite mantra was: "Not all of my friends are clients, but all of my clients are friends."

He will be remembered by those who were in private practice with him for his genuine concern for their success and well-being. He had the genius for understanding that by promoting the skills and work product of his younger associates, it not only stimulated their performance, but also brought greater recognition to the firm. By actively mentoring young attorneys, he gave them the confidence they needed and, simultaneously, a role model they could follow that would make them better lawyers. In 1992, his mentorship was recognized by the entire legal community when the Toledo Junior Bar Association awarded him the highly coveted Order of the Heel.

His love of life in general, and the people who passed through his life in particular, was immeasurable. He brought a sense of humor that could defuse volatile situations while bringing a smile to those who were close to him. There is a word that linguists have a hard time translating into English: "Mensch." It means more than "human" (as reflected in most dictionaries). It describes someone who, in a sort of charismatic way, is tolerant, fair, warm, charitable, just, sensitive, understanding, and forgiving. This is what David Katz always wanted to be and what he was—a Mensch.

* B.A., Denison University, 1971; J.D., University of Toledo, 1978. Partner at the law firm of Spengler Nathanson P.L.L., Toledo, Ohio.